

07/30/21 Friday

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

'As If Nothing Happened': In Shocking 180, Duterte Fully Restores US Visiting Forces Agreement
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Earlier this month, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken reaffirmed Washington's support for Manila's territorial claims in the South China Sea, saying in a thinly-veiled message to Beijing that an "armed attack" on Philippine military or civilian vessels "would invoke US mutual defense commitments."

After months of vacillation on the future of the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has renewed the agreement that allows US troops to remain in the country.

The decision came amid a visit by US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, who is touring several Southeast Asian nations in an attempt to [shore up US defense](#) ties in the region. However, Philippine Defense Secretary Delfin [Lorenzana let slip](#) last week that the agreement was no longer in danger.

"There was a termination letter that was submitted by the government to the US; that letter has been retracted, as if nothing happened," [Lorenzana told](#) the media Friday at the Philippine armed forces' headquarters in Quezon City.

"The VFA is in full force again, there is no termination letter that is pending," he added. "We are back on track, Mr. Secretary, to plan for future exercises under the VFA."

"I don't know the reason behind the President's decision, I am not privy to the decision making. The DFA has been working for this to happen," Lorenzana later said. "Maybe the President was just convinced so he decided to continue with the VFA." However, he noted that Austin's arrival had led to an "open and frank discussion on the status and future direction of Philippines-US engagement."

"They agreed that the alliance can be further strengthened through enhanced communication and greater cooperation, particularly in the areas of pandemic response, combating transnational crimes, including the war on illegal drugs, maritime domain awareness, the rule of law, and trade and investments," he added.

Harry Roque, Duterte's spokesperson, [later clarified](#) the president had made his decision "based on upholding the Philippines' strategic core interest ... and clarity of US position on its obligations and commitments under the MDT (Mutual Defense Treaty)" signed in 1951.

Duterte originally said in February 2020 that the VFA would be cancelled in six months, but has repeatedly ["frozen" that decision](#) and pushed that deadline back. The agreement historically provided the legal pretext for two large military bases on the island of Luzon - Clark Air Base and Subic Bay Naval Base - but the 1991 eruption of Mount Pinatubo severely damaged both bases, forcing them to close, and the Pentagon dramatically reduced its presence in the country.

Lorenzana noted last week that the VFA would have “some addendum, side agreement” added to sweeten the deal, adding on Friday that the controversial part of the VFA in which the US retains custody over soldiers during their trials for heinous crimes in the Philippines would be settled in “an adjunct or an additional agreement between the two countries.”

The issue has come up twice since the VFA entered force in 1999. In 2005, four US Marines were accused of gang-raping a Filipina woman named Suzette Nicolas. Just one was convicted, Lance Corporal Daniel Smith, but his detention in the US embassy in Manila during the trial and after his sentencing provoked fury across the country.

The other case was in 2015, when Lance Cpl. Joseph Scott Pemberton, a US Marine was convicted of murdering a Filipino trans woman named Jennifer Laude while his ship was docked at Subic Bay. Given a lighter sentence than had been sought and than many in the public believed he deserved, the incident prompted calls from [trans rights defenders](#) of “special treatment” for US soldiers in the country. In September 2020, Duterte gave Pemberton an absolute pardon, freeing from prison and deporting him from the country.

Solidifying the VFA means that, for now, the Philippines remains firmly in the US camp, even as Duterte plays China and the US off each other for his own gain. Manila hopes that the US will back its position in the South China Sea, but it’s also continuing to negotiate a [code of conduct](#) for the waterway between other Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members and China. The document would create a structure based on the United Nations Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) for settling the many disputes involving overlapping claims of maritime rights and territorial claims in the South China Sea.

The US has given the talks a cold shoulder, claiming they are being dominated by China. “We don’t believe that any one country should be able to dictate the rules or worse yet, throw them over the transom, and in this regard I’ll emphasize our commitment to freedom of the seas,” [Austin said Monday](#) in Singapore.

The Philippines were a colony of the United States for more than 50 years, following the territory’s seizure from Spain in the Spanish-American War and the bloody suppression of a nationalist insurrection by the US afterward. The Japanese Empire invaded the archipelago in 1941 and turned it into their own colony, but US forces forced the Japanese out before the war was over. In 1947, the Philippines was granted independence.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Treasury Announces New Sanctions on Cuban Police Force in Wake of Protests
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Due to a severe shortage of medical goods on the island caused by US trade-blocking sanctions, solidarity groups in the US have donated millions of syringes to help Cuban doctors administer the country's highly effective self-developed COVID-19 vaccines. Mexico, Russia, and Nicaragua have also shipped hundreds of tons of aid to Cuba.

The US Treasury announced new sanctions under the Global Magnitsky Act on Friday, targeting Cuba's National Revolutionary Police, its director, Oscar Callejas Valcarce, and deputy director,

Eddy Sierra Arias. The Office of Foreign Assets Control noted the [three new additions](#) to the Specially Designated Nationals list on Friday, the latest in a series of retributions by Washington after protests in Cuba earlier this month it says were put down with a heavy hand.

"The Treasury Department will continue to designate and call out by name those who facilitate the Cuban regime's involvement in serious human rights abuse," OFAC director Andrea Gacki said on Friday. "Today's action serves to further hold accountable those responsible for suppressing the Cuban people's calls for freedom and respect for human rights."

Last week, the US [also imposed sanctions](#) on Cuba's Minister of Revolutionary Armed Forces and on the Interior Ministry's special brigade, which US President Joe Biden said were "just the beginning" of actions "targeting elements of the Cuban regime responsible for this crackdown." Protests erupted in several cities in the socialist island nation on July 11, largely motivated by outrage over fuel shortages and a worsening COVID-19 outbreak, which have resulted in intermittent power as electricity is rerouted to area hospitals. Earlier this week, the president of the Cuban Supreme People's Court [said the court](#) was reviewing 19 cases involving 59 people in connection with the protests, which were mostly peaceful and not explicitly against the government.

Also on Friday, [Biden met with](#) Yotuel Romero, a Spain-based dissident Cuban rapper behind the song "Patria y Vida," which US media has described as a "rallying cry" for the protests, especially those by right-wing Cuban-Americans in Miami, Florida, [whose protests](#) have been much more prolonged and militantly anti-socialist than the demonstrations on the island itself have been.

"There will be more [sanctions] unless there is some drastic change in Cuba, which I don't anticipate," Biden told reporters prior to receiving the artists.

According to [The Grayzone](#), behind the popularity of Romero and other musicians and artists associated with the dissident San Isidro Movement "are two traditional CIA fronts: the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED)." In turn, the Cuban government has accused the US of fomenting the protests, and [Sputnik has reported](#) on the efforts of US-based tech giants like Twitter to amplify the message of the most anti-government protesters.

The US government has also accused the Cuban government of shutting down the internet in order to limit citizens' access to information about the protests. On Friday, a senior Biden administration official told reporters that the US was "in talks with private sector providers about the possibility of providing wireless LTE communications to the Cuban people."

"We are also going to be [talking] about humanitarian support for the Cuban people," the official added. "We see the censorship of information as a violation of human rights and so we're going to explore every option possible to be able to be able to guarantee access to that information." The US has blocked the vast majority of trade between Cuba and the rest of the world since the 1959 revolution that threw out US-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista and ushered into power Fidel Castro, who oversaw the socialist transformation of Cuban society and its integration into the Soviet-led Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon). The USSR became the primary buyer of products from the former Spanish colony and American client state, purchasing sugar cane and other goods at a rate favorable to the Cubans, enabling some economic development and an advanced medical industry to be created.

The demise of the USSR and Eastern Bloc socialist states in the early 1990s created a severe crisis in Cuba called the Special Period, during which time the US increased its sanctions on Cuba in an attempt to force the socialist government from power, [creating severe shortages](#) of fuel, machine parts, and medical supplies, among other goods. A brief reprieve came in 2015, when then-US President Barack Obama began the process of normalizing relations with Cuba, but those efforts were reversed just two years later by Obama's successor, Donald Trump, who further [tightened the screws](#) after Cuba continued to support the government of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro when the US attempted to overthrow him in 2019 using another local proxy, then-lawmaker Juan Guaido.

Since 1992, the United Nations has voted overwhelmingly to denounce the blockade; the [most recent vote](#) last month saw 184 nations vote against the blockade and just two nations - the US and Israel - vote for it.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

'About Damn Time': DOJ Reverses Course, Orders Treasury to Hand Trump's Tax Returns Over to Congress
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

The US Department of Justice issued a ruling on Friday saying that the US Treasury must comply with requests by federal lawmakers to turn over the tax returns of former US President Donald Trump, long sought by Democrats due to beliefs and hopes that their contents could bar him from returning to office.

In a [39-page memo issued](#) on Friday, Dawn Johnsen, the acting Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Legal Counsel, said the law requiring the Internal Revenue Service to honor a written request by the House Ways and Means Committee for six years of Trump's tax returns was "unambiguous."

"'Upon written request' of the chairman of one of the three congressional tax committees, the Secretary 'shall furnish' the requested tax information to the Committee," she wrote, citing 26 USC § 6103(f)(1), a 1924 law requiring the documents be presented to the committee.

"Applying the proper degree of deference due the Committee, we believe that there is ample basis to conclude that its June 2021 Request for former President Trump's tax information would further the Committee's principal stated objective of assessing the IRS's presidential audit program—a plainly legitimate area for congressional inquiry and possible legislation," Johnsen added.

Trump was the first presidential nominee from one of the two major parties in years to break tradition and not publicly disclose his tax returns. The real estate mogul provided a variety of excuses, including that he was being audited by the IRS and that he thought they would be too complex for the average American to understand. However, the IRS clarified that an audit doesn't preclude the documents from being made public.

Trump's tax returns were first legally sought by the Manhattan District Attorney's office in 2017. However, in 2019, the Ways and Means Committee submitted a specific request for the years

2013 through 2018. The US Treasury refused to present them, accusing the Democrat-led committee of requesting them for the purposes of making them public and saying the request lacked a "[legitimate legislative purpose](#)." The DOJ at the time supported the Treasury's assertions. [Among other reasons](#), lawmakers wanted the returns to look for evidence of criminal tax fraud or other financial crimes the billionaire might have committed, as well as to examine the truth of his claims to have handed over control of the Trump Organization conglomerate to his children.

After Trump's term ended in January 2021, the committee renewed its endeavor, sending [a fresh request](#) in May.

"It is about damn time," Rep. Bill Pascrell (D-NJ), who chairs the Ways and Means' oversight subcommittee, [said in response](#) to the news. "Our committee first sought Donald Trump's tax returns on April 3, 2019 – 849 days ago. Our request was made in full accordance with the law and pursuant to Congress's constitutional oversight powers."

House Speaker Nancy [Pelosi \(D-CA\)](#) [said](#) that obtaining access to Trump's tax returns is a matter of national security.

"Today, the Biden Administration has delivered a victory for the rule of law," she said. "The American people deserve to know the facts of his troubling conflicts of interest and undermining of our security and democracy as president."

The amount of pressure Trump put on the Justice Department to defend his presidency was revealed somewhat earlier on Friday, when memos from a late December 2020 phone call [were published](#) by the House Oversight Committee in which Trump urged the department to denounce the results of the presidential election the month prior, which he had lost.

The notes show that on December 27, Trump asked then-Acting Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen to "just say that the election was corrupt [and] leave the rest to me and the [Republican] Congressmen." The request came weeks after after former Attorney General [William Barr broke](#) with the president and said there was no evidence of voter fraud in the November 3 election, which the incumbent Trump lost to US President Joe Biden. It also came a little over a week before thousands of [Trump supporters stormed](#) the US Capitol building and temporarily dispersed Congress in an attempt to stop the certification of the Electoral College's voting results, resulting in the deaths of four rioters and one US Capitol Police officer.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

'We're Just Guessing': Report Claims China Dug 'Possible' New Tunnel at Former Nuclear Test Site

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

In recent weeks, US intelligence has twice claimed to have discovered dozens of new nuclear missile silos under construction in China's western desert, although some believe the evidence amounted to nothing but a wind farm expansion.

A report by US [National Public Radio \(NPR\)](#) claims that China "appears" to be digging a new tunnel at Lop Nur, a dry lakebed in Xinjiang where the country once tested nuclear weapons.

"This is new construction linked to areas that have in the past supported nuclear test activities," Renny Babiarz, vice president for analysis and operations at AllSource Analysis, told the outlet. The story was accompanied by a satellite image of a "probable underground facility," most of the labels on which are qualified with words like "probable" and "possible," reinforcing the lack of basis for making claims about what the image shows.

Liu Pengyu, a spokesperson for the Chinese Embassy in Washington, DC, told NPR that China stays committed to the nuclear testing moratorium" all nuclear powers agreed to in the 1990s, adding that he objected to "unacceptable US allegations" that Beijing was trying to undermine the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

Jeffrey Lewis, a professor at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies in Monterey, California, told the outlet that analysts have no idea what's actually happening in China because their nuclear program is so secretive. "[B]ecause we don't have that kind of dialogue, we're just guessing," he said.

Earlier this month, [Lewis also reported](#) the discovery of what he claimed were 120 new nuclear missile silos in another part of Xinjiang, which would increase China's silo capacity nearly tenfold. However, critics online quickly pointed out that the satellite image seemed to show expansion of a nearby wind farm and not underground missile storage tubes.

[A second report](#) earlier this week claimed to have found another missile farm under construction elsewhere in Xinjiang.

At present, China has just 18 nuclear silos, having preferred to keep its small deterrent force of nuclear missiles highly mobile, mounting them on TEL trucks or basing them in ballistic missile submarines. With less than one-tenth the nuclear weapons the United States or Russia has, China's missiles would be significantly more vulnerable to attack if placed in stationary silos, so on its face, the claim that China is building scores of new missile silos appears to be a dramatic departure from decades of Chinese nuclear policy.

China, like the US, has signed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and not detonated a nuclear warhead since 1996. However, certain kinds of "zero yield" tests are still allowed, and experts speaking with NPR conceded that the new construction could be intended for such a test.

"I am someone who thinks that it is probably what are called 'subcritical' nuclear tests, which the United States also does underground at our nuclear test site in Nevada," Lewis told the outlet. The US' most recent subcritical or "cold" test, in which nuclear materials and high explosives are involved but a nuclear fission chain-reaction is never triggered, was [conducted in November 2020](#).

This isn't the first time in recent years the US has claimed China was engaged in suspicious activities at Lop Nur, either. In June 2020, the US State Department claimed in [its annual report](#) on various nations' adherence to arms control agreements that China had "maintained a high level of activity" at the former test site, including "possible preparation to operate its Lop Nur test site year-round."

A [Wall Street Journal](#) article based on the report but published well before its release opened with the claim that "might be secretly conducting nuclear tests with very low explosive power despite Beijing's assertions that it is strictly adhering to an international accord banning all nuclear tests."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

House Republicans Call on Fauci to Explain NIH Grant Funding 'Gain-of-Function' Research in Wuhan
by [Evan Craighead](#)

In May, Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, testified to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions that the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has never funded gain-of-function research. However, some GOP lawmakers have argued that a 2014 NIH subgrant did just that.

Rep. James Comer (R-KY), Ranking Member of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform, and Jim Jordan (R-OH), Ranking Member of the House Committee on the Judiciary, issued a memo on Friday demanding Fauci and Dr. Kristian Andersen, a professor at Scripps Research Institute's Department of Immunology and Microbiology, to brief their respective committees on the type of gain-of-function research that occurred at the Wuhan Institute of Virology, and whether SARS-CoV-2 was engineered to be more contagious.

Gain-of-function research involves the genetic alteration of an organism, in a way that may enhance the biological functions of gene products.

"NIAID funded gain-of-function research at the Wuhan Institute of Virology and this research did not go through the proper oversight," Comer and Jordan wrote.

"It is unclear why you would continue to testify otherwise," the GOP lawmakers said, referring to Fauci's recent testimony before the US Senate, when he got into a shouting match with Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY) over the claims that the US' leading infectious disease expert lied about NIH funding.

"We therefore ask you again to please clarify what you meant when you said twice—under oath—'[t]he NIH has not ever and does not now fund gain-of-function research in the [WIV]," Comer and Jordan wrote.

The NIH funding in question came as part of a 2014 award from the research agency to EcoHealth Alliance. The \$3.4 million grant, to be distributed over a six-year period, was tied to [research on the emergence of coronaviruses from bats](#). Despite a 2019 renewal, the project was ultimately canceled in April 2020, after the first few months of the COVID pandemic in the US.

According to Fauci, around \$600,000 of US grant money was provided to the Wuhan Institute of Virology via subcontract.

The overarching argument raised by House Republicans is based on the opinion that Washington engaged in the funding of gain-of-function research, which was subject to a US government moratorium from October 2014 to December 2017.

[The White House said](#) at the time that the pause would specifically relate to the funding of "gain-of-function research projects that may be reasonably anticipated to confer attributes to influenza, MERS, or SARS viruses such that the virus would have enhanced pathogenicity and/or transmissibility in mammals via the respiratory route."

By December 2017, [the Department of Health and Human Services framework detailed](#) that enhanced "potential pandemic pathogens" (PPP) do not include "naturally occurring pathogens that are circulating in or have been recovered from nature."

Richard Ebright, a professor of chemistry and chemical biology at Rutgers University, has argued that the project "was — unequivocally — gain-of-function research" because it "met the definition for gain-of-function research of concern under the 2014 Pause."

However, Fauci asserted to the US Senate earlier this month that this matter "has been evaluated multiple times by qualified people to not fall under the gain-of-function definition," adding that it was "molecularly impossible" for the viruses involved to have resulted in SARS-CoV-2.

[Both the NIH](#) and EcoHealth have denied funding "gain-of-function" research.

Alina Chan, a postdoctoral researcher at the Broad Institute of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard, [argued on Twitter earlier this year](#) that the gain-of-function moratorium does not apply to the subgrant because the order did not pertain to naturally occurring SARS viruses.

"The work ultimately was not aimed at creating viruses that were more infectious. It was taking parts of natural viruses and studying them in well-characterized virus genome backbones," she detailed in a thread on the matter. "The work ultimately was not aimed at creating viruses that were more infectious. It was taking parts of natural viruses and studying them in well-characterized virus genome backbones."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US DoJ Files Lawsuit to Block Texas Order Restricting Undocumented Migrant Travel in State by [Evan Craighead](#)

Citing a rise in COVID-19 infections, Texas Governor Greg Abbott (R) issued an Executive Order on Wednesday, directing the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) authority to stop "any vehicle" in suspicion of transporting "migrants who pose a risk of carrying COVID-19 into Texas communities."

The US Department of Justice (DoJ) filed a complaint against the state of Texas and its governor, arguing that the recent COVID-19-related EO subverted the federal government's authority.

"No State may obstruct the Federal Government in the discharge of its constitutional responsibilities," read the court document filed in the US District Court for the Western District of Texas, as reported by Reuters.

US Attorney General Merrick Garland (D), who heads the DoJ, issued a memo to Abbott on Thursday, warning the Texas Governor that he must "immediately rescind" his "dangerous and unlawful" EO, or face the US government as it "intends to pursue all appropriate legal remedies to ensure that Texas does not interfere with the functions of the federal government."

Garland, who heads the DoJ, argued that Abbott's Wednesday EO violates a number of federal laws and cannot be enforced by the state of Texas against federal officials, or private companies contracted to work with the federal government.

"The Order would jeopardize the health and safety of noncitizens in federal government custody, federal law enforcement personnel, and their families, and our communities," the US AG wrote.

"Among other harms, the Order would exacerbate and prolong overcrowding in facilities and shelters and obstruct the federal government's arrangements with state, local, and non-governmental partners to ensure that released individuals are transported for appropriate COVID-19 testing to address public health concerns."

Additionally, federal law requires individuals scheduled for release to first visit US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) offices, or make an appearance before an immigration court. The exclusion of this from Abbott's EO "interferes with the implementation of federal immigration law."

The Texas Governor signaled in his response that he would not rescind the EO, arguing that the Biden administration lacks a fundamental understanding of what is "truly happening at the Texas-Mexico border."

Using the AG's words, Abbott claimed that it is the federal government that is actively "jeopardizing the health and safety of Texans on a daily basis by refusing to follow the law" and use the full authority of Title 42 of the United States Code Section 265, which allows immigration officials to deny entry to undocumented individuals if it is believed "there is a serious danger to the introduction of [a contagious] disease into the United States."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Federal Judge Declares Cuba Gooding Jr. Liable in Forcible Rape Lawsuit He Ignored
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Last month, a woman who accused Cuba Gooding Jr. of groping her at a New York City nightclub won a default judgment after the Academy Award-winning actor failed to respond to the accompanying complaint for over a year. Despite Gooding's lack of urgency in a variety of sexual misconduct cases, he has been seen galavanting around the Big Apple.

US District Judge Paul Crotty, on Thursday, found Gooding liable in a [civil lawsuit filed by a woman](#) who accused the 53-year-old of forcibly raping her twice at a hotel in the Manhattan borough of New York City, New York, back in 2013.

"Defendant's failure to appear in this case or answer the complaint after being properly served indicates that his default was willful," [Crotty wrote in the court filing](#).

The decision means that Gooding may be on the line for compensatory and punitive damages. While attorneys for the victim are seeking \$6 million, a decision for damages was not made on Thursday.

The lawsuit, first filed back in August 2020, was dismissed on March 1 for failure to prosecute, but was reopened on March 16. Despite being served on April 22, Gooding did not respond by the May 13 deadline.

According to the initial filing nearly a year ago, Gooding met the woman at a Greenwich Village VIP lounge.

"Jane Doe," the unnamed victim, detailed that Gooding told her that he just wanted to change his clothes, but actually proceeded to vaginally and anally rape her after turning on music. She told Gooding "'no' numerous times but he wouldn't stop," according to the court document. Jane Doe claims she dealt with "emotional pain, suffering, and a loss of enjoyment of life" since the incident.

At the time, Mark Jay Heller, Gooding's attorney, denied that series of events laid out in the court filing and declared the "alleged event never took place."

"The allegations are false. It's an event that took place seven years ago. No complaint was ever lodged. We believe the allegations and the complaint will be dismissed," [he said to Reuters](#).

However, it appears that Gooding paid little attention to the case since.

The actor, who was recently [seen singing karaoke in The Hamptons](#), is set to appear in court on October 18 for charges related to allegations that he allegedly groped three different women in 2018.

Gooding has pleaded not guilty in the upcoming case.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Powerful Magnitude 6.2 Earthquake Strikes Along Peruvian-Ecuadorian Border
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

A similarly strong magnitude 6.0 earthquake previously struck Peru in late June. At the time, the unexpected shake was captured on live TV as news anchor Alvina Ruiz was conducting an on-air interview, in which she nonchalantly admitted that earthquakes "happen."

A powerful magnitude 6.2 earthquake rattled the much of the region along the Peruvian and Ecuadorian border on Friday, readings provided by the European-Mediterranean Seismological Centre (EMSC) revealed. A previous recording indicated the quake weighed in at a magnitude 6.1.

No reports of deaths, injuries or property damage have yet surfaced.

The nonprofit agency further noted that the earthquake struck at a depth of over 30 kilometers, some 24 kilometers from the Peruvian city of Piura, which is known for its colonial-era buildings. One testimonial [collected](#) by the EMSC from an individual living in Machala, Ecuador, some 204 kilometers away from the epicenter, reveal that the earthquake caused only "slight-moderate movement." Another Ecuadorian resident living even further away in Eloy Alfaro, remarked that the quake was very "short."

There have been no reports of additional seismic activity.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

European Regulators Fine Amazon Nearly \$890 Million for Data Breach Violations
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

No stranger to controversy, Amazon has had its fair share of criticism from American and European regulators, especially when it comes to its business practices and the security of user data. Earlier, the tech giant was accused of unfairly competing with sellers on its platforms in Germany and France.

European privacy regulators have fined tech giant Amazon nearly \$890 million for failing to adhere to user data protection policies imposed for the European Union, it was revealed on Friday.

The new finding came from Amazon's Q2 earnings, which happened to include a 10-Q filing with the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) that detailed a €746 million fine from the Luxembourg National Commission for Data Protection (CNPD).

The CNPD is Amazon's primary privacy regulator within the European Union on account of the company having its EU headquarters in Luxembourg.

The fine, which was issued on July 16 and represents about 4.2% of the company's net income for 2020, is the equivalent of some \$887 million and marks the largest-ever fine under the European Union's data protection laws. The largest fine to date had been a hefty [\\$57 million](#) charge filed in 2019 against popular search engine Google.

Notice given to the SEC details that Amazon violated the EU General Data Protection Regulation through its advertising practices. Also included in the securities filing were remarks that indicated the CNPD provided the tech giant with a list of business practices that the company needed to rectify in order to resume compliance.

While Amazon did not offer any details on the specifics of the request, it did underscore in the filing that the accusations were baseless and would be appealed.

In a [statement](#) to The Verge, an Amazon representative commented that the fine is "entirely out of proportion," and that "the decision relating to how we show customers relevant advertising relies on subjective and untested interpretations of European privacy law."

The latest strike dealt by European regulators against Amazon comes months after the e-commerce company was accused of purposely misusing data collected from third-party sellers in order to compete against smaller vendors in France and Germany. The company's "systematic" effort surfaced as part of an EU antitrust investigation in 2019.

Stateside, Amazon is also facing scrutiny from US lawmakers seeking to overhaul the tech giant's business practices through a set of wide ranging antitrust reforms. US President Joe Biden has repeatedly signaled that his administration fully intends to crack down on the tech industry as part of a larger effort to prevent monopolies and promote more competition.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Judge Dismisses One Sexual Assault Charge Against Harvey Weinstein Over Technicality
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Disgraced Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein was earlier extradited to Los Angeles, California, to face his second sexual assault trial. He was previously sentenced to 23 years in prison by a New York court in early 2020 after being found guilty of sexual assault and rape. Convicted sex offender and disgraced movie mogul Harvey Weinstein was granted a slight win in a Los Angeles courtroom on Thursday after the presiding judge ruled in favor of dismissing one count of sexual assault against him.

US Judge Lisa Bench sided in favor of dropping one of the 11 counts of sexual assault against Weinstein after it was determined that the case exceeded the statute of limitations. Prosecutors were subsequently informed to amend the indictment and refile the documents, which they agreed to do.

Weinstein's attorneys had also argued for the dismissal of two other charges on the same grounds, however, Bench disagreed and rejected their calls. Those charges dated back between 2004 and 2005.

Outside of the courtroom, Mark Werksman, who serves as one of Weinstein's legal representatives, specified to reporters that "count 5 is dead," according to [Variety](#). He later remarked, "we're off to a good start."

The count that was dismissed by Bench stemmed from an incident that reportedly unfolded at a Beverly Hills hotel room on May 11, 2010.

Although charges regarding the 2010 incident were initially filed within the 10-year deadline in April 2020, prosecutors indicated that the charge was null and void, since the indictment filed against Weinstein in 2021 created an entirely new case on the alleged offense.

Variety reported that when prosecutors refiled the indictment later on Thursday, they did so with an explanation on count 5 that underscored their filing supersedes the original complaint, as it cites the same argument as the paperwork previously filed in April 2020. All 11 sexual assault charges remain in the new amended filing.

If convicted on all charges, Weinstein could spend the rest of his life in prison since the maximum combined sentence would amount to over 100 years in prison. Weinstein is presently 69 years of age.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Global Account Balances Increased in 2020 After 5 Years of Decline - IMF

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - Global account balances increased in 2020 and will continue to do so this year after having declined in the five years prior, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said in a new report on Monday.

"After declining steadily since 2015, global current account balances - the sum of absolute deficits and surpluses - increased in 2020 and are set to widen further in 2021, amid diverging economic prospects across countries," the report said.

The IMF explained in the report that the set of advanced economies whose account balances increased did so from 69 percent in 2019 to about 72 percent the following year.

"The largest contributors to lower-than-warranted current account balances - as a share of world GDP - were, in order - the United States, France, the United Kingdom and Canada," the report said.

The Netherlands, Germany, Mexico, Poland and Russia were also among the largest contributors to larger-than warranted current account balances, the report also said.

The IMF said global current account balances will be narrowing gradually in the 2022-2026 period, but acknowledged that numerous uncertainties surround this forecast.

In addition, the IMF called on international cooperation to solve account balance-related issues.

"In the near term, policy efforts should focus on averting downside risks by ending the pandemic globally. Strong international cooperation is needed to secure up-front financing for vaccinations and public health measures," the report said.

Over the medium term, countries should be encouraged to take collective action to reduce global imbalances in a growth-friendly manner, the report added.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

RPT - NASA Expects to Support ISS Operations Through 2028 and 'Very Likely Longer' - Spokesman

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - NASA expects to support the International Space Station (ISS) operations from an engineering standpoint through at least 2028 and likely longer, agency spokesman Daniel Huot told Sputnik.

"From an engineering standpoint, we expect we can support station operations beyond that time through at least 2028 and very likely longer, and we continue to update our technical analysis of space station life," Huot said Friday. "NASA and our international partners have committed to funding the space station through at least 2024 and will each work with their respective stakeholders to consider future plans for the ISS."

NASA, he added, seeks "uninterrupted presence in low-Earth orbit" to be able to transition from the station to other platforms where they can continue working in low-Earth orbit.

Earlier, Roscosmos said it is waiting for the US position on extension of the operation of the International Space Station (ISS), it will continue to operate for some time after 2024.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

RPT - Anti-Fracking Group Slams EPA for Allowing Toxic Chemicals to Be Used in Drilling

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The Better Path Coalition is disturbed about a new watchdog report that found the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) allowed oil and gas companies to use toxic chemicals during the fracking process, group co-founder Karen Feridun told Sputnik.

The Physicians for Social Responsibility recently published a watchdog report that found oil and gas companies like Exxon Mobil and Chevron used PFAS, or substances that can degrade into PFAS, during the fracking process in more than 1,200 wells in six US states, mostly in Texas, between 2012 and 2020.

"We are horrified to learn that the EPA has allowed PFAS chemicals to be used in fracking," Feridun said. "The lack of transparency in reporting here in Pennsylvania means we don't know if they're used here... The best approach is to ban their use outright."

The watchdog report said, citing EPA records, that there has been a lack of full disclosure of chemicals used in oil and gas operations in the United States, which raises concerns that PFAS could have been used more extensively than records indicate because oil and gas companies withheld that information.

Confidential business information or trade secret claims may hide the identity and effects of chemicals used for fracking, the report said.

On July 21, the House of Representatives passed the 2021 PFAS Action Act with a 241-183 vote. The legislation would require the EPA to set drinking water standards for PFOA and PFOS, the two most studied PFAS chemicals, and would designate these as "hazardous substances" under the Superfund program to facilitate the cleanup of toxic sites.

"We're happy that the Biden administration has prioritized the PFAS issue, but none of their actions to date change anything about PFAS' use in fracking," Feridun said.

Feridun said meaningful change can only come when the federal government scraps the Bentsen amendment, which exempts drilling fluids and other waste related to oil and natural gas production from the regulatory definition of hazardous waste.

The watchdog report pointed out that the US House Energy and Commerce Committee found that 12 oil and gas companies that conduct hydraulic fracturing were unable to provide the Committee with a complete chemical makeup of the hydraulic fracking fluids they used.

Between 2005 and 2009, the companies used 94 million gallons of 279 products that contained at least one chemical or component that the manufacturers deemed proprietary or a trade secret.

The environmental group Food and Water Watch, citing studies, said long-term exposure to PFAS has been linked to liver malfunction, thyroid disease, weakened immune system, birth defects, and certain cancers. The group said more than 200 million people in the United States would be drinking PFAS-contaminated water.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Anti-Fracking Group Slams EPA for Allowing Toxic Chemicals to Be Used in Drilling

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The Better Path Coalition is disturbed about a new watchdog report that found the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) allowed oil and gas companies to use toxic chemicals during the fracking process, group co-founder Karen Feridun told Sputnik. The Physicians for Social Responsibility recently published a watchdog report that found oil and gas companies like Exxon Mobil and Chevron used PFAS, or substances that can degrade into

PFAS, during the fracking process in more than 1,200 wells in six US states, mostly in Texas, between 2012 and 2020.

"We are horrified to learn that the EPA has allowed PFAS chemicals to be used in fracking," Feridun said. "The lack of transparency in reporting here in Pennsylvania means we don't know if they're used here... The best approach is to ban their use outright."

The watchdog report said, citing EPA records, that there has been a lack of full disclosure of chemicals used in oil and gas operations in the United States, which raises concerns that PFAS could have been used more extensively than records indicate because oil and gas companies withheld that information.

Confidential business information or trade secret claims may hide the identity and effects of chemicals used for fracking, the report said.

On July 21, the House of Representatives passed the 2021 PFAS Action Act with a 241-183 vote. The legislation would require the EPA to set drinking water standards for PFOA and PFOS, the two most studied PFAS chemicals, and would designate these as "hazardous substances" under the Superfund program to facilitate the cleanup of toxic sites.

"We're happy that the Biden administration has prioritized the PFAS issue, but none of their actions to date change anything about PFAS' use in fracking," Feridun said.

Feridun said meaningful change can only come when the federal government scraps the Bentsen amendment, which exempts drilling fluids and other waste related to oil and natural gas production from the regulatory definition of hazardous waste.

The watchdog report pointed out that the US House Energy and Commerce Committee found that 12 oil and gas companies that conduct hydraulic fracturing were unable to provide the Committee with a complete chemical makeup of the hydraulic fracking fluids they used. Between 2005 and 2009, the companies used 94 million gallons of 279 products that contained at least one chemical or component that the manufacturers deemed proprietary or a trade secret.

The environmental group Food and Water Watch, citing studies, said long-term exposure to PFAS has been linked to liver malfunction, thyroid disease, weakened immune system, birth defects, and certain cancers. The group said more than 200 million people in the United States would be drinking PFAS-contaminated water.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Federal Agencies Extend Eviction Moratorium Through September - White House

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - Two US federal housing agencies along with three others extended the pandemic induced eviction moratorium until September, the White House said in a statement.

"The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) eviction moratorium is in place until July 31st, but the Supreme Court's ruling made clear that CDC cannot extend the moratorium past its current expiration date. In light of that decision, the Biden-Harris Administration is taking steps to protect renters at risk of eviction," the release said on Friday. "Today, at the President's

request, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA) have extended their foreclosure-related eviction moratoria until September 30, 2021."

The White House said Biden further asked US agencies which play a significant role in providing and insuring affordable rental housing, to explore all available tools to keep Americans safe and housed.

On Thursday, Biden asked Congress to extend the moratorium on evictions that was put in place due to the coronavirus outbreak, saying many renters still faced financial difficulties and those driven from their homes could face heightened risk from infection.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden Says 'Hopeful' About US-Russian Arms Control Talks

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden told reporters he is hopeful about the US-Russia arms control negotiations that took place in Geneva this week.

"We are in the process and I am hopeful," Biden said on Friday when asked about his thoughts on the US-Russia arms control talks in Geneva.

The State Department said the Geneva consultations that took place Wednesday were professional and substantive. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov echoed the sentiment, saying he was satisfied with the meeting and that the United States demonstrated readiness for constructive dialogue. The two sides agreed to resume talks at the end of September.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden Signs \$2.1Bln Emergency Funding Bill for US Capitol, Afghan Interpreters

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden signed into law a \$2.1 billion emergency funding bill that will enhance security at the US Capitol and assist efforts to relocate Afghan interpreters and their families, the White House said in a press release.

"On Friday, July 30, 2021, the President signed into law: HR 3237, the 'Emergency Security Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021,'" the release said on Friday.

The bill was adopted by Congress with overwhelming support on Thursday.

Earlier this week, Biden asked Congress for \$1 billion to be allocated towards efforts to relocate Afghan nationals who assisted American forces during the war.

Relocation flights for the first group of Afghans applying for Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) status arrived in the United States this week. One known resettlement location is Fort Lee in Virginia, where the SIV applicants and their families will temporarily stay until the vetting process completes.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Charges Canadian National in Plot to Export Lab Equipment to Iran - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - a federal grand jury has indicted a Canadian citizen on charges of illegally exporting laboratory equipment to Iran, the US Justice Department said.

"A federal grand jury in the District of Columbia returned an indictment today charging a Canadian national with the unlawful export of laboratory equipment from the United States to Iran, through Canada and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)," the Justice Department said in a statement on Friday.

Reza Sarhangpour Kafrani, an Iranian national living in Montreal, was indicted on one count of conspiracy, two counts of violations of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), one count of causing a failure to submit export information and six counts of money laundering, the statement said.

The Justice Department said Kafrani and a co-conspirator managed to purchase three mass spectrometers and an autosampler from a US-based company and shipped it to their business based in Canada, Prolife Global Ltd. From there, they conspired to have it shipped to the UAE and then Iran.

The exportation of scientific laboratory equipment such as that purchased by Kafrani are controlled for nuclear nonproliferation reasons, requiring licenses to be shipped from the United States. The US Commerce Department requires a license to export such items to the UAE and the Treasury Department requires a different licence to export to Iran.

Kafrani faces up to five years in prison for the charges of conspiracy and failing to submit export information, as well as up to 20 years for money laundering charges and violations of the IEEPA. The charges may also carry additional financial penalties, according to the statement.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Justice Department Sues Texas Over State Order Restricting Movement of Illegal Migrants

EL PASO, July 30 (Sputnik) - The US Justice Department filed a lawsuit against Texas Governor Greg Abbott after he refused to rescind a state executive order restricting the transportation of illegal migrants due to concerns about the spread of the novel coronavirus, court documents revealed.

"No State may obstruct the Federal Government in the discharge of its constitutional responsibilities," the lawsuit said on Friday. "But on July 28, 2021, the Governor of the State of Texas issued an executive order purporting - 'effective immediately' - to restrict who may lawfully provide ground transportation in Texas to certain groups of migrants who have been detained by

the Federal Government pursuant to US immigration authorities or are otherwise subject to certain Federal authorities."

On Wednesday, Abbott issued an order prohibiting civilians, such as contractors, from transporting illegal migrants as part of an effort to prevent migrants from spreading the novel coronavirus.

Abbott's order interferes with the federal government's ability to carry out its functions because it contains no exception for federal contractors or non-law enforcement federal personnel, the lawsuit said.

The Justice Department said Abbott's order violates US law and should be declared invalid and blocked.

On Thursday, US Attorney General Merrick Garland told Abbott the Justice Department would take legal action if the order was not rescinded, but the Texas governor rejected the warning.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

GAO Decision to Uphold Moon Landing Partner Pick Enables Project's Development - NASA

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The Government Accountability Office's (GAO) decision to uphold NASA's selection of SpaceX as its partner for the development of a human landing system for a lunar mission allows them to continue the development and establish a timeline for the mission, NASA said.

"NASA was notified Friday, July 30, that the US Government Accountability Office has denied the protests filed by Blue Origin Federation and Dynetics and has upheld the agency's source selection of SpaceX to continue the development of its human landing system," NASA said in a statement on Friday. "Importantly, the GAO's decision will allow NASA and SpaceX to establish a timeline for the first crewed landing on the Moon in more than 50 years."

Earlier on Friday, GAO decided that protests from billionaire Jeff Bezos's space company Blue Origin and technology company Dynetics were groundless, as NASA was within its rights to award a \$2.9 billion contract to SpaceX to develop the first lunar landing system to be used in more than 50 years.

NASA added in its statement that astronaut safety remains the highest priority during its mission to establish a long-term presence on the Moon. The space agency said it will provide updates on the way ahead for the lunar expedition, known as Artemis, and will continue working with the Biden administration and Congress to ensure funding for the lunar project remains robust.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden Directs Treasury, State Departments to Recommend How to Get Remittances to Cubans

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden directed the department of State and Treasury to provide him with recommendations within one month on how to get remittances to the Cuban people while bypassing the Cuban government.

"I've directed the State Department and Treasury Department to provide me, within one month, recommendations on how to maximize the flow of remittances to the Cuban people without the Cuban military taking their cut," Biden said on Friday.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden Says US Will Continue to Add Sanctions on Individuals in Cuba Over Alleged Abuses

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden during remarks at the White House said the United States will continue to impose sanctions on individuals in Cuba over alleged abuses.

"We're going to continue to add sanctions on individuals that carry out their regime's abuses," Biden said on Friday.

Earlier in the day, the US Treasury imposed sanctions on Cuban National Revolutionary Police and the head of the force in its latest round of sanctions against the island nation.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Resumes Expedited Removals of Migrant Families - DHS

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is once again utilizing expedited removal flights to return migrants who do not qualify for protection back to their countries of origin, the department said.

"[T]he Department of Homeland Security today resumed expedited removal flights for certain families who recently arrived at the southern border, cannot be expelled under Title 42, and do not have a legal basis to stay in the United States," DHS said on Friday.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement Air Operations returned families apprehended by Customs and Border Protection back to their home countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras.

DHS said that by placing the families into expedited removal, they are making clear that those who do not qualify to stay in the US will be promptly removed.

The Biden administration is currently working to expand lawful pathways into the US, DHS said, adding that irregular migration is dangerous, particularly for families with children and teenagers.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) -

INTERNATIONAL SPACE STATION

- * NASA expects to support the International Space Station (ISS) operations from an engineering standpoint through at least 2028 and likely longer, agency spokesman Daniel Huot told Sputnik on Friday.
- * Cosmonauts on the ISS opened the hatch into the Multifunctional Laboratory Module (MLM) Nauka for the first time, according to the negotiations of the crew with the flight control on Earth that was broadcast by NASA.
- * Roscosmos is waiting for the US position on extending the operation of the ISS and will continue to operate for some time after 2024, Russia's space agency chief Dmitry Rogozin, said.
- * US and Russian crews on the International Space Station (ISS) have no additional issues with the normal altitude control after the incident with the Russian module Nauka, Huot told Sputnik.

US CONFISCATES OIL TANKER FOR SANCTIONS VIOLATIONS

- * A US federal court has confiscated a 2,734-ton oil tanker, M/T Courageous, that was allegedly used to deliver petroleum products to the North Korea in violation of the existing sanctions regime, the Justice Department said on Friday.

ATTACK ON JAPANESE VESSEL IN INDIAN OCEAN

- * Two crew members of Japanese-owned Mercer Street vessel that was attacked in the Indian Ocean died, Zodiac Maritime ship management company said on Friday.
- * The crew took back control of the Mercer Street vessel, Zodiac Maritime ship management company said.

US POLICY ON CUBA

- * The United States has targeted the Cuban National Revolutionary Police and the head of the force in its latest round of sanctions against the island nation, the Treasury Department announced on Friday.
- * The United States is currently in discussions with private sector firms on providing internet to the Cuban people and bypassing censors, a senior administration official told reporters.

FOREST FIRES IN TURKEY

- * Turkish police and intelligence are investigating the causes of wildfires raging in the country's south, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Friday, adding that Russian and Ukrainian planes are being used to extinguish the fires.
- * The US authorities have not received any request from Turkey to provide assistance in fighting wildfires, a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) spokesperson told Sputnik.

SHOOTING IN BERLIN

- * Four people were injured on Friday in Berlin's district of Wedding, the police are conducting a special operation, the Berliner Zeitung reported.
- * Three of the four victims of the shooting in Berlin were seriously injured, they have gunshot and knife wounds, the city police told Sputnik.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Seizes Oil Tanker Allegedly Violating North Korea Sanctions - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) – A US federal court has confiscated a 2,734-ton oil tanker, M/T Courageous, that was allegedly used to deliver petroleum products to the North Korea in violation of the existing sanctions regime, the Justice Department said on Friday.

"A New York federal court today entered a judgment of forfeiture regarding the M/T Courageous, a 2,734-ton oil-products tanker used to make illicit deliveries of petroleum products through ship-to-ship transfers with vessels flagged in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea) and direct shipments to the North Korean port of Nampo," the Department said in a release.

It is alleged that Kwek Kee Seng, a Singaporean national, purchased the Courageous vessel for over \$500,000 to use it for ship-to-ship transfers of \$1.5 million worth of oil to a North Korean ship as well as to travel to the North Korean port of Nampo in violation of the US and the United Nations sanctions against Pyongyang, the Department said.

Kwek remains at large and charged with conspiracy to evade economic sanctions on the North Korea and money laundering conspiracy that involved a variety of payments denominated in US dollars that were processed through US-based correspondent accounts to purchase oil, the release said.

The vessel was initially seized by Cambodian authorities in March 2020 under the US seizure warrant followed by a civil forfeiture complaint on behalf of the US Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York on April 2023, according to the release.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Ottawa Working 'Very Hard' to Relocate Afghans Who Assisted Canada War Efforts - Freeland

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - Ottawa is sparing no effort to relocate Afghans who assisted Canadian military efforts in the war-torn country, to Canada, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland said on Friday.

"We are working very, very hard to do the work to... identify these people and then to very quickly bring them back to Canada," Freeland said during a campaign-style stop in Hamilton, Ontario.

The Canadian government announced a resettlement program for those who cooperate with its defense forces last week.

Freeland acknowledged that the situation for Afghan interpreters and facilitators, who the Taliban terror group (banned in Russia) views as traitors, is tense and that they remain in imminent danger.

However, Freeland declined to reveal the specifics of Ottawa's efforts, including deadlines for when Afghans will be processed and relocated to Canada as well as the number of applicants. The evacuation of Afghan interpreters is also a hot topic in the United States, where the first group of some 200 evacuees landed on Friday morning.

The Canadian military, which was primarily active in Kandahar, exited the Afghan war in 2014.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Stocks Dip on Day, Week After Inflation Woe: July Still Up

NEW YORK, July 30 (Sputnik) - Stocks on Wall Street fell broadly on the day and week on concerns that US inflation was outpacing economic recovery from the novel coronavirus, although the modest gain for July eked out by equity markets suggested that cautious investing might be the way forward.

The Dow Jones, the broadest US equity barometer on the New York Stock Exchange, closed Friday's trade down 149 points, or 0.4 percent, at 34,935. It fell 0.4 percent for the week but rose 1.3 percent for July.

The tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite index finished the day down 106 points, or 0.7 percent, at 14,673. Nasdaq, heavily weighted by Amazon, also tumbled from disappointing second-quarter earnings posted by the e-commerce behemoth after Thursday's bell. The Big Tech index finished the week down 1.1 percent while rebounding 1 percent for July.

Amazon, which lost 7 percent on its own stock price, also pulled down the S&P 500, which groups the top 500 stocks on the New York Stock Exchange. The index settled Friday's trade down 21 points, or 0.5 percent, at 4,398. For the week, the S&P 500 declined 0.4 percent, while for July, it rose 1.8 percent.

"Risk appetite did not stand a chance given it is month end, peak earnings are passing by, and most of corporate America is still complaining about trouble finding workers and over persistent supply chain issues," Ed Moya, head of research for the Americas at New York brokerage firm OANDA, said. "So many investors look like they are ready to turn cautious as Wall Street becomes fixated over figuring out how soon will the economy make substantial progress in the labor market recovery."

US economic data this week had been less than comforting to investors. The first reading for second-quarter GDP growth came in at 6.5 percent, well below the 8.5 percent that economists polled by US media had forecast.

The Federal Reserve's preferred gauge for inflation - the core Personal Consumption Expenditure Index, which is stripped of volatile food and energy prices - increased by 3.5 percent year-on-year in June for its biggest expansion since 1991. US jobless claims stood at

400,000 and above for a second week in a row, suggesting a continued challenge for the fragile labor market recovery from the pandemic.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Resumes Expedited Removals of Migrant Families - Homeland Security Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said on Friday that it has resumed utilizing expedited removal flights to return migrants who do not qualify for protection back to their countries of origin.

"[T]he Department of Homeland Security today resumed expedited removal flights for certain families who recently arrived at the southern border, cannot be expelled under Title 42, and do not have a legal basis to stay in the United States," DHS said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Seizes Oil Tanker Allegedly Violating North Korea Sanctions - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) – A US federal court has confiscated a 2,734-ton oil tanker, M/T Courageous, that was allegedly used to deliver petroleum products to the North Korea in violation of the existing sanctions regime, the Justice Department said on Friday.

"A New York federal court today entered a judgment of forfeiture regarding the M/T Courageous, a 2,734-ton oil-products tanker used to make illicit deliveries of petroleum products through ship-to-ship transfers with vessels flagged in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea) and direct shipments to the North Korean port of Nampo," the Department said in a release.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Attack on UN Compound in Afghanistan's Herat Kills 1 Afghan Police Officer - UN Mission

UNITED NATIONS, July 30 (Sputnik) - One Afghan police officer was killed and several others were injured after unknown attackers targeted the United Nations compound in the city of Herat on Friday, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said.

"The United Nations in Afghanistan condemns in the strongest terms the attack today on its main compound in Herat that resulted in the loss of life of an Afghan police guard and injuries to other officers," UNAMA said in a statement on Friday, adding that no UN personnel was hurt during the attack.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also condemned the attack and expressed his condolences to the policeman's family as well as wished speedy recovery to those who were injured.

"The Secretary-General reiterates the United Nations commitment to support the Government and people of Afghanistan in their efforts to achieve peace and stability," UN spokesman Farhan Haq said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Urges All Regional Actors to Encourage Afghan Sides to Return to Negotiations -Sullivan

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The United States is appealing to all regional actors to urge the parties to the conflict in Afghanistan to resume negotiations after an attack on a United Nations compound in Herat, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Friday.

"The United States strongly condemns the attack on the United Nations compound in Herat, Afghanistan that resulted in the death of an Afghan guard," Sullivan said in a statement. "We reiterate our call for an immediate reduction in violence in Afghanistan, and for all regional actors to encourage the parties to return to negotiations without delay so that the Afghan people can achieve a durable and just political settlement that brings the peace and security they deserve."

One Afghan police officer was killed and several others got injured after unknown attackers targeted the United Nations compound in Herat on Friday, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said earlier in the day.

"The United Nations in Afghanistan is a civilian entity focused on supporting peace efforts, promoting the rights of all Afghans and providing humanitarian and development assistance," Sullivan stated. "Attacks against civilian UN personnel and facilities are prohibited under international law."

Afghanistan is witnessing a spike in violence as international troops began withdrawing from the country. The Taliban have since launched an offensive and overrun large swaths of land.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Russian Ban to Impact US Mission Operations, Ability to Engage in Diplomacy - Blinken

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The United States considers as unfortunate the decision by the Russian government to impose restrictions on hiring Russian or third-country staff and warns that it may affect the safety of the mission's personnel and Washington's ability to engage in diplomacy with Moscow, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement on Friday.

"These unfortunate measures will severely impact the US mission to Russia's operations, potentially including the safety of our personnel as well as our ability to engage in diplomacy

with the Russian government," Blinken said. "Although we regret the actions of the Russian government forcing a reduction in our services and operations, the United States will follow through on our commitments while continuing to pursue a predictable and stable relationship with Russia."

In June, US Ambassador John Sullivan said the US embassy in Russia will be unable to fully provide consular services starting on August 1 due to the recent ban on employment of locals and third-country nationals.

Blinken said the United States is deeply saddened this action will force the firing go of 182 local employees and dozens of contractors at the US diplomatic facilities in Moscow, Vladivostok, and Yekaterinburg.

"The United States is immensely grateful for the tireless dedication and commitment of our locally employed staff and contractors at US Mission Russia. We thank them for their contributions to the overall operations and their work to improve relations between our two countries. Their dedication, expertise and friendship have been a mainstay of Mission Russia for decades," he said.

Earlier on Friday, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said Moscow expects Washington to bring its embassy staff in line with the new requirements no later than August 1 and this issue is finally and irrevocably closed.

In April, Russia banned the US embassy from hiring locals and third-country nationals as part of a wave of tit-for-tat sanctions. According to the ambassador, this will make the embassy unable to fully provide consular services.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said in June that Russia will not hinder the United States from replacing local employees with US citizens, while the limit on the number of staffers must remain at 455,

On April 15, the United States imposed sanctions on 32 Russian entities and individuals for alleged cyberattacks and also ordered ten Russian diplomats out as well as prohibited US entities from purchasing Russian government bonds during primary placements.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Urges All Regional Actors to Encourage Afghan Sides to Return to Negotiations -Sullivan

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The United States is appealing to all regional actors to urge the parties to the conflict in Afghanistan to resume negotiations after an attack on a United Nations compound in Herat, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Friday.

"The United States strongly condemns the attack on the United Nations compound in Herat, Afghanistan that resulted in the death of an Afghan guard," Sullivan said in a statement. "We reiterate our call for an immediate reduction in violence in Afghanistan, and for all regional actors to encourage the parties to return to negotiations without delay so that the Afghan people can achieve a durable and just political settlement that brings the peace and security they deserve."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Over 500,000 Vaccinated on Friday After Biden Announced \$100 Incentive - White House

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The US government has reported that more than half-a-million people received vaccines against the novel coronavirus on Friday after President Joe Biden announced an incentive of \$100 to get the jab, White House Deputy Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said.

"So, today we recorded over half a million new shots in arms, the highest number since the 1st of July, and the average number of people getting their first shots each day is up 30 percent over the past week alone. This is the third week that states with the highest cases have the highest vaccination rates," Jean-Pierre said at a press briefing on Friday.

On Thursday, Biden called upon state and local governments to incentivize individuals who remain unvaccinated against the novel coronavirus by paying them \$100 in a bid to boost vaccination rates amid the increasing Delta variant cases.

The highest number of vaccines administered was recorded on April 8 with nearly 4.5 million shots made on a single day. Starting that day, the vaccination rate in the United States has been steadily decreasing and has fluctuated around 500,000 jabs daily in July.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US in Talks With Private Sector on Cuba Internet Access, Bypassing Censors - Official

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The United States is currently in discussions with private sector firms on providing internet to the Cuban people and bypassing censors, a senior administration official told reporters on Friday.

"We are in talks with private sector providers about the possibility of providing wireless LTE communications to the Cuban people which we consider to be a right for including all options but also looking at other ways to make sure that the Cuban people have the right to information, the right to communicate with each other and the international community can really see the abuses that are taking place," the official said. "We are also going to be [talking] about humanitarian support for the Cuban people."

The United States will explore all possible options to circumvent the Havana's control over the flow of information into Cuba, the official said.

"We see the censorship of information as a violation of human rights and so we're going to explore every option possible to be able to be able to guarantee access to that information," the official said during a press briefing.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden Mourns Death of Ex-Senator Carl Levin, Calls Him 'Brilliant, Humble' - White House

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) – President Joe Biden has issued a tribute to former senator Carl Levin, his close friend and colleague in the US Senate for 30 years, the White House announced on Friday.

"For thirty years, Carl Levin and I served together in the United States Senate. He was one of the most honorable and decent people I have ever known," Biden said in a statement. "Brilliant, humble, and principled, Carl earned the trust of his constituents and colleagues by doing the work. "

Levin served for 36 years in the Senate, making him, the longest serving Senator in Michigan history, the president recalled.

"As chairman and ranking member of the Armed Services Committee during my time leading the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, I saw how he built consensus to protect our national security, uphold our values, and honor the service of every patriot in uniform," the statement said.

Levin led on critical issues ranging from the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons, ending the use of torture to seeking to protect the jobs of workers in the US auto industry, Biden recalled.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Authorizes Possible \$83.5M In Sale of Up to 300 Javelin Missiles to Thailand - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The US State Department has approved a possible \$83.5 million sale of 300 Javelin missiles to Thailand, the Defense Department said on Friday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Thailand of Javelin Missiles and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$83.5 million," the Defense Department said in a press release.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

New US Sanctions Target Cuban National Revolutionary Police, Head of Force - Treasury

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The United States has targeted the Cuban National Revolutionary Police and the head of the force in its latest round of sanctions against the island nation, the Treasury Department announced on Friday.

The Cuban National Revolutionary Police, Oscar Alejandro Callejas Valcarce, and Eddy Manuel Sierra Arias have been added to the US Specially Designated Nationals List on Friday, according to the Treasury.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Approves Possible \$3.4Bln Sale of Up to 18 CH-53K Helicopters to Israel - DSCA

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The US State Department has approved a possible \$3.4 billion sale of 18 CH-53K King Stallion helicopters, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency said on Friday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Israel of CH-53K Heavy Lift Helicopters with Support and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$3.4 billion," DSCA said in a press release.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Not Considering National Vaccine Requirement 'At This Time' - White House

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is not currently considering a national vaccine requirement, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters on Friday.

"A national vaccine requirement is not under consideration at this time," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing.

The US federal government and several local jurisdictions have reimposed some masking requirements amid the rise in cases due to the Delta variant.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Will Not Head Toward Another COVID Lockdown Despite Delta Surge – White House

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) – The Biden Administration does not plan to introduce a new range of the coronavirus lockdown measures despite the recent surge of cases of the Delta variant, White House Deputy Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Friday.

"We have the tools in our tool belt to fight this [Delta] variant, and we are not going to head towards a lockdown. We want to make sure that we're doing everything that we can, because after passing the historic rescue plan, we have the resources to make sure that [lockdown] does not happen," Jean-Pierre said at a press briefing.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Russian Ban to Impact US Mission Operations, Ability to Engage in Diplomacy - Blinken

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The United States considers a decision by the Russian government to impose restrictions on hiring Russian or third-country staff unfortunate, and warns that it may affect both the safety of the mission's personnel and Washington's ability to engage in diplomacy with Moscow, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement on Friday.

"These unfortunate measures will severely impact the US mission to Russia's operations, potentially including the safety of our personnel as well as our ability to engage in diplomacy with the Russian government," Blinken said. "Although we regret the actions of the Russian government forcing a reduction in our services and operations, the United States will follow through on our commitments while continuing to pursue a predictable and stable relationship with Russia."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US State Dept. Condemns Attack on UN Compound in Afghanistan's Herat - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The United States condemns the attack on the UN compound in the city of Herat in western Afghanistan and calls to immediately end the ongoing violence, US Deputy Spokesperson Jalina Porter said in a press briefing on Friday.

"The United States condemns the attack on the UN compound in Herat by the anti-government militants which sadly resulted in the death of a local guard," Porter said.

"We continue to call for an immediate end to this ongoing violence in Afghanistan which exacerbates the humanitarian situation there and has also led to a growing number of civilian casualties and internal displacement," she added.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

NASA Expects to Support ISS Operations Through 2028 and 'Very Likely Longer' - Spokesman

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - NASA expects to support the International Space Station (ISS) operations from an engineering standpoint through at least 2028 and likely longer, agency spokesman Daniel Huot told Sputnik on Friday.

"From an engineering standpoint, we expect we can support station operations beyond that time through at least 2028 and very likely longer, and we continue to update our technical analysis of space station life," Huot said. "NASA and our international partners have committed to funding the space station through at least 2024 and will each work with their respective stakeholders to consider future plans for the ISS."

NASA, he added, seeks "uninterrupted presence in low-Earth orbit" to be able to transition from the station to other platforms where they can continue working in low-Earth orbit.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Mission Condemns Attack on UN Compound in Herat, Calls for Accountability - Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, July 30 (Sputnik) - The US Mission to the United Nations condemned the attack on the UN compound in Afghanistan's city of Herat and called for the perpetrators of the act to be held accountable, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said in a statement on Friday.

"The United States condemns the attack on the United Nations compound in Herat by anti-government militants, which resulted in the death of a local guard defending the compound," Thomas-Greenfield said. "Attacks against civilians and protected persons and objects are prohibited under international law, and the perpetrators of this deplorable action must be held accountable."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Concerned by Reports of Attack on Israeli Tanker, Monitoring Situation - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The US is deeply concerned about reports of an attack on an Israeli-managed tanker off the coast of Oman, State Department Principal Deputy Spokesperson Jalina Porter said on Friday.

"The United States extends our sincere condolences to the victims and loved one, and we're also deeply concerned by the reports and are monitoring the situation closely," Porter said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Justice Dept. Says Treasury Must Hand Over Trump's Tax Returns to US House Committee

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The Treasury Department must hand over former President Donald Trump's tax returns to the US House Ways and Means Committee, acting Assistant Attorney General Dawn Johnsen said in a memorandum on Friday.

"For the foregoing reasons, we conclude that the Secretary must comply with the Ways and Means Committee's June 16, 2021 request pursuant to 26 USC § 6103(f)(1) to furnish the Committee with the specified tax returns and related tax information," Johnsen said.

The Ways and Means Committee has requested six years of Trump's individual tax returns and tax returns of eight Trump-related businesses, the memorandum said.

The memorandum said the Ways and Means Committee is interested in obtaining Trump's tax returns in order to check the presence of any foreign financial influences, business entanglements concerning tax laws, or conflicts of interest that may have affected his responsibilities as US president.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US 'Very Concerned' By Situation in Syria's Dara'a, Urges De-Escalation - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The United States is very concerned about the situation in the city of Dara'a in southern Syria and calls on all parties in the area to immediately de-escalate tensions and allow the free movement of civilians and aid, US State Department deputy spokesperson Jalina Porter said on Friday.

"We are very concerned about the situation in Dara'a, including reports of harmed civilians and the extremely difficult and restrictive conditions imposed on the inhabitants by the Syrian regime," Porter said during a press briefing. "We call on all sides to immediately de-escalate and allow aid and civilians to move freely."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Three-Fourths of People Infected in Large Massachusetts Outbreak Fully Vaccinated - CDC

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - About three-fourths of the people infected in a large coronavirus outbreak in the state of Massachusetts were fully vaccinated, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said in a new report on Friday.

"During July 2021, 469 cases of COVID-19 associated with multiple summer events and large public gatherings in a town in Barnstable County, Massachusetts, were identified among Massachusetts residents," the report said. "Approximately three quarters (346; 74 percent) of cases occurred in fully vaccinated persons (those who had completed a 2-dose course of mRNA vaccine or had received a single dose of Janssen vaccine ≥14 days before exposure)," the report said.

The CDC said in the report that almost 80 percent of the vaccinated patients were symptomatic and most of them had contracted the Delta variant of the novel coronavirus.

"Findings from this investigation suggest that even jurisdictions without substantial or high COVID-19 transmission might consider expanding prevention strategies, including masking in indoor public settings regardless of vaccination status, given the potential risk of infection during attendance at large public gatherings that include travelers from many areas with differing levels of transmission," the report said.

CDC recommends event organizers and local health jurisdictions to continually assess the need for additional measures, including limiting capacity at gatherings or event postponement, the report added.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Pelosi Says Release of Trump's Tax Returns 'Matter of National Security' - Statement

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi commended the Justice Department on Friday for ordering the Treasury Department to hand over former president Donald Trump's tax returns to a House committee, saying the release of the documents was a national security issue.

"Access to former President Trump's tax returns is a matter of national security. The American people deserve to know the facts of his troubling conflicts of interest and undermining of our security and democracy as president," Pelosi said in a statement.

Earlier on Friday, Acting Assistant Attorney General Dawn Johnsen issued a memorandum on Friday ordering the US Treasury Department to hand over Trump's tax returns and other pertinent tax information to the Ways and Means Committee.

Pelosi hailed the decision as "a victory for the rule of law" that upholds the public interest.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Canada Not Ready for Booster Shots, Getting 'Operationally Ready' for Prospect - Official

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - Canada is not yet ready to roll out COVID-19 booster shots amid concerns over the highly infectious Delta variant, Chief Public Health Officer Dr. Theresa Tam said on Friday.

Booster shots are increasingly being considered as an option to curb the spread of the highly contagious Delta variant - first discovered in India - which is showing increased resistance to available COVID-19 vaccines.

"Right now, there's not enough data to suggest that in Canada we would go into boosting as of yet," Tam said during a press briefing on Friday.

Canada's chief medical officer did note that Ottawa is getting "operationally ready" for the possibility of booster shots.

On Thursday, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett announced that Israel would begin to offer booster vaccination for those older than 60 as of Sunday. However, Canada, which still has a sizeable proportion of its population still waiting for their second dose, is months behind Israel's vaccination program.

Chief Public Health Officer Dr. Njoo noted that increased vaccine uptake among approximately 3.6 million unimmunized Canadians is the preferred option to curtailing the spread of the Delta variant.

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), over 80 percent of Canadians have received their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and two thirds are considered to be fully vaccinated.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Justice Department Says Treasury Must Hand Over Trump's Tax Returns to House Committee

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The US Treasury Department must hand over former President Donald Trump's tax returns to the House Ways and Means Committee, acting Assistant Attorney General Dawn Johnsen said in a memorandum on Friday.

"For the foregoing reasons, we conclude that the Secretary must comply with the Ways and Means Committee's June 16, 2021 request pursuant to 26 USC § 6103(f)(1) to furnish the Committee with the specified tax returns and related tax information," Johnsen said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Canada Coronavirus Transmission Rate Expected to Grow to 12,000 Cases By August 8 - Model

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - Canada's rate of coronavirus transmission is rising for the first time in weeks and could see up to 12,000 new infections by August 8, an updated epidemiology and modeling report revealed on Friday.

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), the Rt - the basic reproductive number, which measures how many other individuals will be infected by a single individual carrying the virus - has stood above 1 since July 18 after several weeks of decline.

The PHAC warned that the resurgence in transmissibility could also lead to a spike in new cases. Canada is projected to log between 2,978 and 12,033 new cases by August 8, including 125 virus-related deaths.

In addition, the number of new cases could skyrocket in the fall if number of contacts is increased by 25 percent, PHAC said.

As of Friday, PHAC has reported nearly 1.4 million coronavirus cases and more than 26,500 coronavirus-related fatalities.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Central Bank Should End Stimulus by March, Hike Rates by End of 2022 - Fed Official

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve should end by March the stimulus it has been providing the US economy since the COVID outbreak and raise interest rates by the end of 2022, James Bullard, a senior official of the central bank, said on Friday.

"By the conclusion of the first quarter of 2022, the Fed should complete its taper," Bullard, president of the St. Louis chapter of the Fed, said in a speech, referring to the term popularly used for ending the central bank's stimulus. "If needed, terminating the taper in early 2022 would pave the path for a rate hike that year. A Q4 2022 interest rate increase is my best case." The Fed has been buying at least \$80 billion of Treasury securities and \$40 billion of agency mortgage-backed securities monthly to support the US economic recovery since the coronavirus outbreak 16 months ago. It has also kept US interest rates at a record low of between zero and 0.25 percent.

Fed Chairman Jerome Powell said earlier this week that now was not the time yet for a revision of either, saying focus should be on the central bank's twin mandates of trying to achieve maximum employment for Americans amid the economic recovery and ensuring inflation is sustained at 2 percent per annum and not more.

The United States lost more than 21 million jobs between March and April 2020, at the height of business lockdowns forced by the coronavirus. More than 7 million of those jobs have yet to return, officials say.

On the inflation trend, the Fed's closely-followed core Personal Consumption Expenditures Price Index - which excludes volatile food and energy prices - rose by 3.5 percent year-on-year in June for its fastest expansion in 30 years, Commerce Department data showed on Friday.

Powell cautioned earlier this week that inflation could run higher and more persistent in the near term than forecast as the economy adjusts to bottlenecks caused by the pandemic. But over time, inflation should subside and be more in line with the Fed's target of 2 percent per annum, he said.

While Powell and Bullard both belong to the Fed's Federal Open Market Committee, it is not uncommon for members of the policy-making panel to have differences in opinion on the economy and inflation.

Bullard said, in his opinion, it was critical for the Fed to start discussing a move towards taper now to avoid strong tightening later.

"For 2022, I want flexibility; it's prudent to get started now," the St. Louis Fed president said. "It is a risk to push the taper-process start into next year. Inflation expectations have moved up and are at a good level. I see second-half 2021 US (economic) growth being stronger than 1st half."

The economy grew by an annualized rate of 6.5 percent in the second quarter of 2021, after a 3.5 percent contraction for all of 2020 due to shutdowns and other disruptions caused by the pandemic.

The Fed envisions a 6.5 percent expansion for all of this year, although some officials at the central bank have more ambitious expectations, forecasting growth of up to 7.0 percent.

The problem for the Fed though is inflation as prices of almost everything have soared from the lows of the pandemic.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Widow of Assassinated Haitian President Moise Says Hitmen Thought She Was Dead - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The assassins who killed Haitian President Jovenel Moise believed that they also killed his wife upon leaving the scene, Martie Moise said an interview with the New York Times on Friday.

"When they left, they thought I was dead," Martie Moise said, adding that the assassins even stepped on her feet and shined a flashlight in her eyes to check whether she may be still alive. Martie Moise's hand and elbow were struck by bullets shortly after the assassins attacked their residence and her husband told her to get down on the floor beside their bed. She said the only thing she saw before her husband was killed was their boots.

However, Moise noted that none of the assassins spoke Creole or French. Instead, they spoke only Spanish as they searched through files the president kept in the room. Whatever they were searching for, they found it, she added.

The Haitian authorities have detained a number of people from Columbia, Haiti and the United States in connection with the assassination. Some of the men from Columbia are known to have received training from the US military.

Moise said only the "oligarchs and the system" could kill her husband perhaps in reference to the struggle between the late president and some of Haiti's oligarchs.

The Biden administration has offered its assistance to the Haitian government in the aftermath of the assassination, including offers to aid in the investigation and appointing career diplomat Daniel Foote as a special envoy to the country.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Senate Votes 66-28 to Start Debate on \$1Tln Infrastructure Deal

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The US Senate has voted to begin debate on the \$1 trillion infrastructure deal.

The Senate voted 66-28 to proceed on the legislative vehicle for the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said they intend to get the legislation passed before the chamber leaves for a recess on August 9.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Myanmar Military Killed at Least 930 Civilians Since February 1 Coup - United Nations
UNITED NATIONS, July 30 (Sputnik) - At least 930 civilians, including women and children, have been killed by Myanmar's security forces since the military coup on February 1, United Nations associate spokesperson Eri Kaneko said on Friday.

"Since the military takeover nearly six months ago, the violence carried out by security forces has left at least 930 civilians dead, including women and children," Kaneko said during a press conference.

Kaneko said the United Nations has been receiving reports of other continuous breaches of human rights, including arbitrary detention, torture, ill-treatments and forced disappearances by the Myanmar military junta.

"The United Nations in Myanmar calls for accountability to bring the perpetrators to justice," Kaneko added.

On February 1, Myanmar's military overthrew the civilian government and declared a year-long state of emergency.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UN 'Very Concerned' By Death of 8 Civilians in South of Syria - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, July 30 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is gravely concerned about the reports of the deaths of least eight civilians, including children, and others injured due to violence in southern Syria, UN associate spokesperson Eri Kaneko said in a press briefing on Friday.

"In Syria, the UN is very concerned about reports of civilian casualties and displacement due to hostilities in Dara'a Al Balad and the risk of further escalation," Kaneko said.

"The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has documented the death of eight civilians, including a woman and four children, with another six civilians, including two children, wounded between the 27th and the 29th of July," she said.

Some 2,500 people have been displaced by the violence in the last three days, Kaneko pointed out. Meanwhile, the United Nations received reports of more than 10,000 people being displaced in the area.

"UN and humanitarian partners are working to scale up the humanitarian response to people in need in Dara'a Al Balad and in the areas of temporary displacement," Kaneko said.

The United Nations is monitoring the situation, including reports of relative calm today to allow the reaching of a local agreement, and reiterated the call by UN chief Antonio Guterres for a nationwide ceasefire and de-escalation of the situation, she added.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden Picks UN Envoy to Head US Delegation to Olympic Closing Ceremony - White House
WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden has chosen US ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield to lead the official US delegation to the closing ceremony of the Tokyo Olympic Games on August 8, the White House announced on Friday. "President Joseph Biden today announced the designation of a Presidential Delegation to Japan to attend events of the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympic Games and the Closing Ceremony on Sunday, August 8," the White House said in a statement. "Linda Thomas-Greenfield, US Ambassador to the United Nations, will lead the delegation."

Biden also named Raymond Greene, Chargé d'Affaires ad interim at the US Embassy in Tokyo and Marcia Bernicat, Senior Official for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment and Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental Affairs to the delegation, the statement said.

A 55 percent majority of Americans agree with the decision to hold the Olympics in Tokyo during the coronavirus pandemic, although about a third have less interest in the games than in years past, a Monmouth University poll said earlier this week.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Court Reschedules Sentencing for Russia's Alexander Grichishkin to August 18

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - A US federal court rescheduled sentencing for Russian national Alexander Grichishkin, who pleaded guilty to conspiring providing hosting services to cybercriminal clients who attacked US companies and financial institutions, a court filing revealed on Friday.

"A video conference has been scheduled before District Judge Denise Page Hood as follows: ... Sentencing: August 18, 2021 at 11:00 AM," the US Eastern District court of Michigan said. The sentencing was originally scheduled for August 6.

Grichishkin and Andrei Skvortsov from Russia, Aleksandr Skorodumov from Lithuania, and Pavel Stassi from Estonia were members of a hosting organization that allegedly helped a number of cybercriminals evade detection by US law enforcement after they caused millions of dollars in losses to victims in the United States, the Justice Department said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Documents Show Trump Pressed Justice Dept. to Overturn 2020 Election Results - Lawmakers

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The US House Oversight Committee on Friday released documents that it said show that former President Donald Trump pressured the Justice Department to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election.

"Today, Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney, the Chairwoman of the Committee on Oversight and Reform, released handwritten notes taken by then-Acting Deputy Attorney General Richard P. Donoghue of a December 27, 2020, phone call with former President Donald J. Trump and former Acting Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen. These notes reveal attempts by former President Trump to directly pressure the two most senior officials at the Department of Justice (DOJ) to overturn the certified results of the 2020 election or risk losing their jobs," the Oversight Committee said in a press release.

The documents show that Trump pressured Rosen to have the Justice Department say the 2020 election was corrupt.

Trump told Rosen that the Justice Department was failing to respond to legitimate complaints of voter and election fraud, but Rosen said those allegations were not supported by evidence and informed the former US president that much of the information he was citing is false, the documents show.

Rosen told Trump the Justice Department could not and would not try to change the outcome of the presidential election, the documents show.

Trump continued to claim the results of the 2020 election were illegal and corrupt, at one point mentioning that he could replace Rosen with then-Assistant Attorney General Jeffrey Clark, according to the documents.

Due to these findings, the Oversight Committee requested that Clark, former Acting Deputy Attorney General Richard Donoghue, former White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows, former Associate Deputy Attorney General Patrick Hovakimian, former US Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia Byung Jin Pak and former Acting US Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia Bobby Christine appear for transcribed interviews.

Several US election security agencies and the Justice Department disputed Trump's allegations of election and voter fraud. The Trump campaign lost more than 60 lawsuits alleging voter fraud in a failed bid to reverse the 2020 election results.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Smoke From Wildfires Affecting Air Quality of States Across US - Biden

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The smoke from wildfires is affecting the air quality of all states across the United States, President Joe Biden said on Friday.

"Smoke from these wildfires burning in West and along the Canadian border is affecting the air quality of states across the country," Biden said during at a discussion on wildfires.

The US president noted that since the last meeting on wildfires in June, the number of large uncontained fires doubled to 66 and more than 3.4 million acres have already been burned. Biden has recently announced the US federal government will use satellite technology to help detect wildfires, boost aviation assets, ensure there are more than 15,000 federal firefighters on standby as well as increase wages for firefighters to more than \$15 an hour, among other initiatives.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UN Mission in Libya Welcomes Reopening of Coastal Road - Statement

UNITED NATIONS, July 30 (Sputnik) - The UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) issued a statement on Friday welcoming the opening by the country's warring parties of the main coastal highway along the Mediterranean Sea.

"UNSMIL welcomes the official opening of the coastal road,... effective 30 July 2021," the statement said. "The Mission congratulates the Libyan people, national and local authorities, institutions, and stakeholders involved, especially the role of 5+5 JMC in this landmark and historic achievement."

UN Special Envoy for Libya Jan Kubis said the opening of the coastal road represents another step in strengthening peace, security and stability in the country and the unification of Libya's institutions.

"The next major step in the Ceasefire Agreement's implementation process is to commence the withdrawal of all mercenaries, foreign fighters, and forces from Libya without delay," Kubis added.

The Coastal Highway that links the capital of Tripoli with the city of Benghazi has been closed since the launch of an offensive on Tripoli in April 2019 by Khalifa Haftar, commander of the Libyan National Army (LNA).

In October 2020, Libya's warring parties - the Government of National Accord (GNA) and the LNA - signed a nationwide ceasefire agreement during UN-facilitated joint military commission talks in Geneva.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Mercenaries, Private Contractors Must Leave for Libya to Achieve Peace - United Nations

UNITED NATIONS, July 30 (Sputnik) - Mercenaries and related private security contractors must leave Libya in order to pave the way for achieving peace in the country and hold elections, the United Nations Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries said on Friday.

"Nine months after the ceasefire agreement calling for withdrawal of foreign forces and mercenaries from Libya, mercenaries and private military and security contractors continue to operate in the country," Working Group Chair Jelena Aparac said. "Their continued recruitment and presence in Libya impedes progress in the peace process and constitutes an obstacle for the upcoming elections."

While elections have been scheduled to be held in December, the Working Group said the presence of mercenaries and private security actors endangers the safe and secure election environment.

The Working Group warned that "well-trained and well-armed" private contractors operating in Libya from countries such as Russia, Syria, Sudan, and Chad could also end up negatively impacting the security and stability of the region more broadly.

The statement from the UN Working Group comes nine months after an initial ceasefire was negotiated in Libya, which called on foreign forces and mercenaries to exit the country.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Over 100,000 Children in Tigray Risk Dying From Malnutrition in Next 12 Months - UNICEF

UNITED NATIONS, July 30 (Sputnik) - More than 100,000 children in Ethiopia's Tigray region face the risk of suffering severe acute malnutrition during the next year, representing a tenfold increase from the average annual number, UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) spokesperson Marixie Mercado said in a press briefing on Friday.

"UNICEF estimates that over 100,000 children in Tigray could suffer from life-threatening severe acute malnutrition (SAM) in the next 12 months - a tenfold increase compared to the average annual caseload," Mercado said.

The data comes as new United Nations humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths and other officials are currently visiting Tigre to meet with Ethiopian officials and discuss scaling up the humanitarian response.

Mercado said UNICEF has recently started to reach areas of Tigray that were inaccessible due to the fighting and confirmed its "worst fears" about the health of children in the region.

After conducting the screening of more than 435,000 children, UNICEF found out that 15.6 percent suffer moderate acute malnutrition, which exceeds the emergency level of 15 percent, Mercado said.

Mercado pointed out the crisis is taking place amid "extensive" and recurring damage of humanitarian systems and services and restrictions on access to parts of the regions.

"We need unfettered access into Tigray and across the region in order to provide support children and women urgently need," Mercado said.

The United Nations said earlier some 400,000 people in the northern Ethiopian region face famine and another 1.8 million who may soon do so.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden to Accept Kosovo Award on Behalf of His Deceased Son Beau - White House

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Sunday will accept a medal on behalf of his deceased son Beau from Kosovo President Vjosa Osmani in recognition of his activity on strengthening the country's justice system, according to the pre-recorded video message published by the White House.

"We [Biden family] just want to say this is incredible, and want to thank the Republic of Kosovo for this medal. It is a great honor. It is a great honor to recognize the legacy of our son Beau," the message said on Friday. "We are grateful to all the people of Kosovo, who Beau fell in love with. So much so that he believed so deeply in your independence and your democracy." In the message, Biden noted that the United States will continue to support Kosovo's movement toward democracy as well as the country's economic development and its efforts to fight the coronavirus pandemic with vaccines that are supposed to arrive from COVAX within weeks. Beau Biden was the US President's oldest son and died from brain cancer in 2015. Following the US war against the so-called rump Yugoslavia - consisting of Serbia and Montenegro - and in support of Albanian separatists in 1999, Beau worked on behalf of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to train judges and prosecutors in order to reform the justice system there. The Albanian leadership in Kosovo named one of the highways after Beau Biden in 2016.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

NASA Says Russian Crew Moving to US Segment of Space Station 'Regular Practice'

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The Russian crew having moved to the US segment of the International Space Station (ISS) is part of regular practice, NASA spokesperson Daniel Huot told Sputnik on Friday.

"Russian crew members are in the USOS side of the station frequently as we still do a lot of cross-agency collaboration on different experiments," Huot said. "They also regularly use the USOS side for recording and joining for crew meals."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

NASA Says Starliner Was Ready for Friday Launch, But Will Take Time to Check Nauka Module

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - Boeing's Starliner spacecraft was ready to launch on Friday, but the International Space Station (ISS) will use additional time to continue checking Russia's recently arrived module Nauka, NASA spokesperson Daniel Huot told Sputnik.

"NASA and Boeing have elected to stand down from Friday's launch attempt of the agency's second Orbital Flight Test (OFT-2) mission. Currently, the earliest available launch opportunity is 1:20 p.m. EDT Tuesday, Aug. 3," Huot said. "The ISS team will use the time to continue working checkouts of the newly arrived Roscosmos Nauka multipurpose laboratory module (MLM) and to ensure the station will be ready for Starliner's arrival."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

New York Times Postpones Staff Return to Offices for Indefinite Time Due to Delta Variant

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The New York Times indefinitely postponed the planned return of its employees to the newspapers' offices due to the coronavirus Delta variant, an email by CEO Meredith Kopit Levien to the newspaper staff said on Friday.

"In light of the evolution of the virus, including new trends around the Delta variant and the updated guidance from the CDC this week on masking, we have decided to push out our plans for a full return at this time," Levien said.

The New York Times employees were due to return to the newspaper's offices for at least three days a week beginning on September 7.

Levien said the newspaper's offices would be open for those who work there voluntarily, but only employees who are vaccinated will be allowed in.

The New York Times is "not ready to specify a new date for a full reopening," she added.

Similarly, the Washington Post recently announced that vaccination was the necessary condition for employment by mid-September.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Documents Show Trump Pressed Justice Dept. to Overturn 2020 Election Results - Lawmakers

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The House Oversight Committee on Friday released documents that it said show that former President Donald Trump pressured the Justice Department to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election.

"Today, Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney, the Chairwoman of the Committee on Oversight and Reform, released handwritten notes taken by then-Acting Deputy Attorney General Richard P. Donoghue of a December 27, 2020, phone call with former President Donald J. Trump and former Acting Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen. These notes reveal attempts by former President Trump to directly pressure the two most senior officials at the Department of Justice (DOJ) to overturn the certified results of the 2020 election or risk losing their jobs," the committee said in a press release.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

No Additional Issues With ISS Altitude Control After Nauka Incident - NASA to Sputnik

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - US and Russian crews on the International Space Station (ISS) have no additional issues with the normal altitude control after the incident with the Russian module Nauka, NASA spokesperson Daniel Huot told Sputnik on Friday.

"The teams restored the station to a normal attitude yesterday at 12:29 CDT (17:29 GMT) and have had no additional issues with normal attitude control," Huot said.

7/30/2021 11:50:15 AM -04:00

NASA on Transfer of Russian ISS Crew to US Segment Says Move 'Part of Regular Practice' Sputnik

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Canadian Economy Contracts for Second Straight Month in May - Statistics Agency

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - Canadian economic output declined for a second straight month in May, with the economy contracting by 0.3 percent, the state statistics agency said on Friday.

"Real gross domestic product (GDP) contracted 0.3 percent in May, following a 0.5 percent decline in April," Statistics Canada said in its monthly economic report.

In total, 12 out of 20 economic sectors saw a decline in output, led by construction, retail and manufacturing industries, the report said.

The losses were partially offset by the public and finance sectors, which grew by 0.7 and 0.4 percent, respectively, the report added.

The Canadian economy is approximately 2 percent below pre-coronavirus pandemic levels, according to the agency, widening the gap from the 1 percent difference observed a month earlier.

Preliminary data indicates that economic activity increased by 0.7 percent in June.

Canada expects its GDP and employment levels to reach pre-pandemic levels at some point during 2021, according to the federal budget delivered in April.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Air Force Says Second ARRW Hypersonic Missile Test Fails as Rocket Motor Did Not Ignite

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The second test of the Air-launched Rapid Response Weapon (ARRW) hypersonic missile failed this week after the rocket motor did not ignite, the US Air Force said in a release on Friday.

"The Air Force conducted its second AGM-183A Air-launched Rapid Response Weapon booster flight test July 28," the release said. "While it did not meet all flight objectives, the test demonstrated several first-time events as the program continues to track toward fielding a hypersonic capability in the early 2020s."

The Air Force said the missile cleanly separated from the B-52 bomber but the rocket motor did not ignite.

Although the flight sequence failed, the Air Force pointed out that the test successfully demonstrated the missile's GPS acquisition, fin operation, and power transfer from the aircraft to the missile.

Existing hypersonic weapons are capable of flying at speeds of up to 27 times the speed of sound and are highly maneuverable while operating at varying altitudes. The United States has made the development of hypersonic missiles a priority after Russia and China developed hypersonic weapons.

The Biden administration's defense budget proposal for 2022 aims to increase funding for hypersonic weapons development by \$52 million for a total of \$238 million.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

UN Envoy Shreim Meets US, Yemen Officials in Saudi Arabia - Statement

UNITED NATIONS, July 30 (Sputnik) - Acting UN Special Envoy for Yemen Muin Shreim discussed with US Special Envoy Timothy Lenderking and senior Yemeni officials the urgent need to cease all forms of hostilities in the Republic, the United Nations Office of the Special Envoy for Yemen (OSESGY) said in a press release on Friday.

"The Acting Head of OSESGY, Muin Shreim, has concluded yesterday a two-day visit to Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, during which he met with Yemeni Vice President Ali Mohsen and Prime Minister Maeen Abdulmalek as well as other senior Yemeni officials. He also met with US Special Envoy Timothy Lenderking and other diplomats working on the Yemeni file," the release said.

"Mr. Shreim discussed the urgent need to agree on a cessation of all forms of military operations in Yemen and across the border," the release also said.

The acting UN envoy also stressed it was essential to take urgent humanitarian and economic measures to alleviate the suffering of the Yemenis and create a conducive environment to resume the political process in the country, the release added.

Shreim addressed the immediate need to eliminate all obstacles preventing the government of Yemen from returning to the temporary capital of Aden and carrying out its functions, according to the release.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Consumer Spending Up 1% in June, Rising With Inflation - Commerce Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - US consumer spending increased by 1 percent in June, Commerce Department data revealed on Friday, indicating that the end of government COVID-19 payouts has not had an undue impact on the spending habits of Americans. Consumer spending, which accounts for more than 60 percent of US economic activity, slowed in May, sliding by 0.1 percent after personal relief payouts for the coronavirus pandemic subsided. The 1 percent increase last month puts consumer spending now back on the positive track after the increase of 0.9 percent in May and 4.7 percent in April.

The increase in consumer spending came on the back of the fastest growth in a decade in a US inflation gauge closely followed by the Federal Reserve. The core Personal Consumption Expenditures Price Index expanded by 3.5 percent year-on-year in June, Commerce Department data showed.

On Wednesday, Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said US price pressures could run higher and more persistent in the near term than forecast as the economy adjusts to bottlenecks caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The central bank has a long-term inflation target of 2 percent per year.

The US economy itself grew by an annualized rate of 6.5 percent in the second quarter of 2021, after a 3.5 percent contraction for all of 2020 due to shutdowns and other coronavirus pandemic measures.

The Federal Reserve has said it envisions a 6.5 percent expansion for all of this year, although some officials at the central bank have more ambitious expectations, forecasting growth of up to 7 percent.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Inflation Gauge PCE Index Increases Most in 30 Years - Commerce Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The core Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) price index, an inflation gauge closely followed by the Federal Reserve, increased at its fastest rate in three decades in the year up to the month of June, US Commerce Department data revealed on Friday.

The PCE price index increased by 3.5 percent year-on-year in June, a notch above the 3.4 percent annual increase in May, and represents the fastest increase in inflation since 1991, the Commerce Department data showed.

On Wednesday, Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said price pressures in the United States could run higher and more persistent in the near term than forecast as the economy adjusts to bottlenecks caused by the coronavirus pandemic measures. The Federal Reserve has a long-term inflation target of 2 percent per annum.

The US economy grew by an annualized rate of 6.4 percent in the first quarter of 2021, after a 3.5 percent contraction for all of 2020 due to shutdowns and other restrictive coronavirus pandemic measures.

The Federal Reserve has said it envisions a 6.5 percent expansion for all of this year, although some officials at the central bank have more ambitious expectations and forecasting growth of up to 7 percent. The problem the Federal Reserve encounters is an increasing rate of inflation as prices of almost all commodities have soared from the lows of the pandemic.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Canada's Top Diplomat Calls for Ceasefire in Tigray in Call With Ethiopian Counterpart

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - Canada is calling on a paramilitary group and the Ethiopian government to cease hostilities in the Tigray region, Foreign Minister Marc Garneau told his Ethiopian counterpart Demeke Mekonnen during a conversation on Friday.

"Minister Garneau called for the Tigray People's Liberation Front and government forces to cease military action in and around Tigray," Global Affairs Canada said in a readout of the conversation.

Garneau reiterated Ottawa's call for Eritrea, which has sent troops across the border in support of Ethiopian government forces, to withdraw from the region.

Canada's top diplomat also urged his Ethiopian counterpart to secure immediate access for humanitarian assistance in the war-torn region and called for an end to targeted attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure.

The sides to the conflict should engage in talks to bring about a political solution to the crisis, Garneau said.

Clashes in the province of Tigray erupted in November after the Ethiopian government accused the local ruling party - the Tigray People's Liberation Front - of ambushing a regional army post to hijack weapons and arm anti-government militia. The Tigray region has since been occupied by the Ethiopian military, resulting in the fighting with the region's rebels.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Has Not Received Request From Turkey to Assist in Fighting Wildfires - FEMA

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - The US authorities have not received any request from Turkey to provide assistance in fighting wildfires, a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) spokesperson told Sputnik on Friday.

"Wild land firefighting falls within the purview of the US Forest Service in coordination with the National Interagency Fire Center, which to date we have confirmed has not received a request from the government of Turkey," the spokesperson said.

The United States may send technical specialists and equipment to other countries to assist with wildfire suppression, incident management and post-fire rehabilitation efforts at the request of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and several other government entities, he added.

Earlier in the week, fires flared up in the Mediterranean and Aegean regions of Turkey. The Turkish authorities said four people have been confirmed dead and 183 injured.

In the popular Turkish resorts of Bodrum and Marmaris, several hotels were evacuated due to massive fires. Bodrum Mayor Ahmet Aras told Sputnik that the fire in the suburbs was contained and all evacuated tourists returned to their hotels.

On Friday, Minister of Forestry and Agriculture Bekir Pakdemirli said that 20 wildfires were still raging in six southern provinces of Turkey, while 42 fires had been contained.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Trade Representative's Top China Adviser Mark Wu Resigns - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - US Trade Representative's top China adviser Mark Wu has resigned, citing family issues among reasons for his departure, the Wall Street Journal reported on Friday.

"The plan had always been to help [Trade Representative] Katherine Tai settle into her role. The team has settled into place and a rhythm has been established," Wu said.

Wu said family issues were one of the reasons for leaving his post, but emphasized that his departure has nothing to do with the US Trade Representative's review of China policy.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Vice President to Visit Singapore, Vietnam Next Month - White House

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamala Harris will visit Singapore and Vietnam next month to engage with the leaders of both countries on a range of issues, including regional security and the coronavirus pandemic, White House Senior Advisor and Chief Spokesperson Symone Sanders said on Friday.

"Vice President Kamala Harris will travel to Singapore and Vietnam next month to strengthen relationships and expand economic cooperation with two critical Indo-Pacific partners of the United States," Sanders said in a statement. "During the trip, the Vice President will engage the leaders of both governments on issues of mutual interest, including regional security, the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and our joint efforts to promote a rules-based international order."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US SEC to Seek Disclosures from Offshore Issuers Linked to China-Based Companies - Chair

WASHINGTON, July 30 (Sputnik) – The US Securities and Exchange Commission will begin seeking disclosures from offshore issuers linked to China-based companies before processing registrations for initial public offerings, SEC Chair Gary Gensler said in a statement on Friday. "I have asked staff to seek certain disclosures from offshore issuers associated with China-based operating companies before their registration statements will be declared effective," the statement said. "I have asked staff to ensure that these issuers prominently and clearly disclose that investors are not buying shares of a China-based operating company but instead are buying shares of a shell company issuer that maintains service agreements with the associated operating company."